

668 Only toward the end of 1926, after the most persistent petition-
 • 631 ing in the Kremlin, and at that time petitioning had not yet become
 728 perilous, the question of uniting the Gomel' Guberniya to the B. S. S. R.
 was raised. However M. Kalinin himself, the President of the Central
 Executive Committee of the R. S. F. S. R. , came out sharply against
 unification. The Kremlin was forced to resort to a peculiar sort of
 plebiscite in order to refute the pretensions of the Belorussians. It
 organized a special commission with the Latvian, Peters, as presi-
 dent, which was to determine on the spot what language was spoken
 by the inhabitants of Gomel' Guberniya. It was decided that the popu-
 lation had forgotten its language and finally become Russified. No
 research was undertaken to determine where the population belonged
 ethnologically. The commission traveled around the sizable territory
 of the Gomel' Guberniya using the following method for its investi-
 gations: upon arriving in some inhabited place and meeting the
 peasantry, the members would enter upon some sort of unofficial con-
 versation. This was taken down in shorthand, and an analysis of the
 notes refuted the calculations of those who had opposed the inclusion
 of Gomel' Guberniya in the B. S. S. R. The real reasons for the opposi-
 tion to having the Guberniya transferred were of an economic nature.
 Gomel' Guberniya is very rich in various raw materials, especially
 high quality forests which are so situated that transportation of the wood
 is very convenient. It is criss-crossed in many directions by railroad
 lines and convenient water routes. A well equipped match industry is
 centered there, one which at that time was the most active in the
 U. S. S. R. , and there is a paper industry in Dobrush. Obviously it was
 not intended that the economy of the B. S. S. R. be strengthened at the
 expense of that of the R. S. F. S. R. This is confirmed by the fact that
 such industrial centers as Zlynka, Novozybkov, Klinty, and Starodub,
 all within twenty or thirty kilometers of Gomel', were not given to the
 B. S. S. R. , simply because some match factories and other manufactur-
 ing are located there. The fact of the unification itself passed
 unnoticed by the masses. Gomel' Guberniya was included in the
 B. S. S. R. without the customary fanfare and pomp. /13/ The
 Belorussian nationalist circles were faced with new problems.
 It was indispensable to take all measures to include the new
 territory with its Belorussian population within the general scope
 of operations as quickly as possible, and, moreover, this transitional
 process had to be accomplished very carefully and painlessly. It all

668 depended on the capable efforts of the new Belorussian workers who
631 were sent into what had been Gornel' Guberniya. They were able to
728 cope with the task.

Minority Problems

563 The equality on the Belorussian territory of the four official
191 languages, Belorussian, Russian, Polish, and Jewish, was recognized
by a governmental decree. In practice only Belorussian was at all
widely used, and Russian was employed in dealing with institutions
of the U. S. S. R. Jewish and Polish were spoken in the national
schools, kindergartens, theaters, libraries, and so on. The severity
with which equality of the four languages was enforced sometimes
became absurd. In the town of Rechitsa in 1928, at a municipal
teachers conference, one participant who was the principal of a
Jewish school made her observations in a speech in Jewish. Of course
661 an interpreter had to be used. A Belorussian schoolteacher, Mokhnach,
who had been renowned in the past for his liberal convictions and
activities, but who unfortunately was versed in the unexpected twists
and turns of Soviet policy, proposed quite correctly that all speakers
use "Russian, as it is the most widely understood." For this proposal,
which would appear to have been quite innocent, Mokhnach was
accused of Great Russian chauvinism, immediately fired from his
job, excluded from the trade union, and also deprived of a pension
after his forty-five years of service in the school system. This shows
just how unsuccessfully the Soviets could choose a subject upon whom
to demonstrate how severely and unrelentingly anyone would be
punished who transgressed against the Stalinist policy towards the
minorities.

583 Special court chambers where litigation was conducted in
[692] Jewish were opened in the large cities to serve the Jewish population.
In small towns and in some larger ones where Jews lived in compact
groups, local and village soviets were formed -- providing service for
the population in its native language. /14/

The national work concerning the so-called Polish population
of Belorussia was a rather special case. In Minsk and in other cities
there were several responsible workers /in the nationalist movement/
who were Poles by nationality. They were almost all Communists
and native-born Poles, for the most part deriving from the Polish
Socialist Party (P. P. S.). Moreover, twenty-five percent of the native

I INTRODUCTION

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The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is situated on the western border of the U.S.S.R. between the upper and middle reaches of the Rivers Dnieper, Bug, and Western Dvina. The area of the Republic is about 89,000 square miles; and in October 1939 its population was estimated at 10,386,000 inhabitants; the capital city is Minsk. Approximately a quarter of the territory consists of valuable coniferous (pine and fir) and deciduous (oak and aspen) forests. The climate is mild and humid; and beneath the soil lie large deposits of pent, phosphorites, fire-proof, acid-proof and porcelain clay, marl, sand for glass making, and bituminous shale.

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The B.S.S.R. was proclaimed on January 1, 1919. In 1922, together with the other Soviet Republics, it formed one of the constituent Republics of the U.S.S.R.

At the Republican level, its government consists of a Council of Ministers and the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet (the legislative assembly of the Republic). At the Federal level, it has representatives in the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., which is divided into two chambers having equal legislative power: the Soviet of Union elected on the basis of one member for every 300,000 of population; and the Soviet of Nationalities, elected on the basis of 25 deputies from each Union Republic, 11 from each Autonomous Republic, five from each Autonomous Region, and one deputy from each national area. Also at the Federal level are the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. - the highest organ of executive and administrative power - and the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R.

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Each Republic has the right to enter into relations with foreign states and to conclude treaties with them; but foreign affairs concerning the interests of the Union as a whole are dealt with by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R. Certain of the ministries - for example, the Ministry of Foreign Trade - are the exclusive prerogative of the Union Government. Others exist both at the Union level and in the individual republics; and a number exist only in the republics.

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For administrative purposes the Byelorussian Republic is divided into thirteen "oblasts", or provinces, which in turn are subdivided into "raions", or counties. Oblasts and raions are not necessarily uniform in size and population, but vary according to the concentration of industry, or for administrative convenience.

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Between its inception in 1919 and the outbreak of war in 1941, the B.S.S.R. had made substantial progress in all directions. Universal education had been introduced, and over a million children attended school. Before the war the Republic had 23 higher educational institutions, a large number of technical schools, and 30 scientific research institutes headed by the Academy of Science.

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421 economy, their household furniture and utensils and articles of personal use and convenience, as well as the right of inheritance of personal property of citizens, is protected by law.

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471 Art. 11. The economic life of the Belorussian SSR is determined and directed by the State national economic plan with the aim of increasing the public wealth, of steadily improving the material conditions of the working people and raising their cultural level, of strengthening the Belorussian SSR, and of consolidating the independence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and strengthening its defensive capacity.

441 Art. 12. In the Belorussian SSR work is a duty and matter of honour for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat."

The principle applied in the Belorussian SSR is that of socialism: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work."

Chapter II. The State Structure

631 Art. 13. For the purpose of mutual assistance among the Union Republics along economic and political lines, as well as along the line of defence, the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic voluntarily united with the other equal Soviet Socialist Republics, namely:

The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic,
The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and
The Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic

in a federal state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Proceeding from the aforesaid, the Belorussian SSR ensures to the USSR, as represented by its higher organs of state power and organs of state administration, the rights defined in Article 14 of the Constitution of the USSR.

Outside of the spheres set forth in Article 14 of the Constitution of the USSR, the Belorussian SSR exercises state authority independently, retaining its sovereign rights in full.

Art. 14. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic consists of the Baramovich, Bzruisk, Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Minsk, Makhilov, Molodechno, Pinsk, Polotsk and Polotsk Regions.

642 Art. 15. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic reserves the right freely to secede from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Art. 16. The territory of the Belorussian SSR may not be altered without its consent.

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645 by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and is subordinate both to the Council of Ministers of the Belorussian SSR and the corresponding Union-Republican Ministry of the USSR.

Art. 50. Each Republican Ministry of the Belorussian SSR directs the branch of state administration entrusted to it and is directly subordinate to the Council of Ministers of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 51. The Government of the Belorussian SSR or a Minister of the Belorussian SSR to whom a question of a member of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR is addressed must give a verbal or written reply in the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR within a period not exceeding three days.

Chapter V. The Local Organs of State Power

631 Art. 52. The organs of state power in regions, districts, cities, settlements and villages are the Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 53. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of regions, districts, cities, districts in big cities, settlements and villages are elected by the working people of the respective regions, districts, cities, settlements and villages for a term of two years.

Art. 54. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of regions, districts, cities, settlements and villages direct cultural, political and economic affairs on their territory, draw up the local budgets, direct the work of the organs of administration subordinate to them, ensure the maintenance of public order, assist in strengthening the defensive capacity of the country and ensure the observance of the laws and the protection of the rights of citizens.

Art. 55. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies adopt decisions and issue orders within the limits of the powers vested in them by the laws of the USSR and the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 56. The executive and administrative organ of the Soviet of Working People's Deputies of a region, district, city, settlement or village is the Executive Committee elected by it, consisting of a Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, a Secretary and members.

[623] Art. 57. The executive and administrative organ of the Soviet of Working People's Deputies in a small locality is the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the Secretary elected by the Soviet of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 58. The Executive Committee of the Soviet of Working People's Deputies of a region, district, city, settlement or village exercises guidance in cultural, political and economic affairs within its territory on the basis of decisions taken by the corresponding Soviet of Working People's Deputies and superior state organs.

Art. 59. Sessions of regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies are convened by their respective Executive Committees not less than three times a year.

Sessions of district Soviets of Working People's Deputies are convened by their respective Executive Committees not less than four times a year.

Art. 60. Sessions of Soviets of Working People's Deputies of cities, districts in big cities, settlements and villages are convened by their respective executive organs not less than once a month.

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Art. 61. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of regions, districts, cities or districts in big cities each elect a Chairman and a Secretary for the duration of their sessions to conduct the sittings of the sessions.

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Art. 62. The Chairman of a settlement or village Soviet convenes the Soviet and conducts its sittings.

Art. 63. The executive organs of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies are directly accountable both to the Soviets of Working People's Deputies which elected them and to the executive organs of the respective superior Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 64. The superior Executive Committees of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies have the right to annul decisions and orders of inferior Executive Committees and to suspend decisions and orders of inferior Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 65. The superior Soviets of Working People's Deputies have the right to annul decisions and orders of inferior Soviets of Working People's Deputies and of their Executive Committees.

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Art. 66. The regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies set up the following Departments and Administrations of their Executive Committees:

- a Department of Agriculture
- a Department of Finance
- a Department of Trade
- a Department of Public Health
- a Department of Public Education
- a Department of Local Industry
- a Department of Municipal Economy
- a Department of Social Maintenance
- a Department of Motor Transport
- a Department of Local Fuel Industry
- a Department of Roads
- a General Department
- a Department of Arts
- a Department of Village and Kolkhos Building
- a Department of Cultural and Educational Institutions
- a Planning Commission
- a Cadres Sector

under the Chairman of the Chairman of the Executive Committee and, in addition, in accordance with the specific features of the economy of the Region, the regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies set up the following Departments, subject to confirmation by the Union-Republican Ministries of Light Industry, Food Industry, Timber Industry and State Farms:

- a Department of Light Industry
- a Department of Food Industry
- a Department of Timber Industry
- a Department of State Farms.

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Art. 67. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Justice of the Union set up their own administrations under the regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies, in accordance with the conditions of the region and on the basis of the laws of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

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633 Departments of the district Soviets of Working People's Deputies or directly to the corresponding Departments of the regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 74. The Departments of city Soviets of Working People's Deputies of Baranovich, Bobruisk, Borisov, Brest, Vileika, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Lida, Moghilev, Masyr, Molodechno, Orsha, Pinsk, Polotsk, Rechitsa and Slutsk are subordinate in their activities both to the Soviets of Working People's Deputies of these towns and their executive committees as well as to the corresponding department of the regional Soviet of Working People's Deputies directly.

Art. 74a. The Departments of the city Soviet of Working People's Deputies of Minsk are subordinate in their activities both to the city Soviet of Workers' Deputies of Minsk and its Executive Committee as well as to the corresponding Ministry of the Belorussian SSR directly.

631 Art. 75. On the expiration of the terms of office of the regional, district, city, settlement or village Soviets of Working People's Deputies, their executive and administrative organs retain their powers until the newly elected Soviets shall have formed new executive and administrative organs.

Chapter VI. The Budget of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

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[645] Art. 76. The state budget of the Belorussian SSR is drawn up by the Council of Ministers of the Belorussian SSR and submitted by it to the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR for its approval.

Upon its approval by the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR the state budget of the Belorussian SSR is published for general information.

Art. 77. The Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR elects a Budget Commission, which reports its conclusions on the state budget of the Belorussian SSR to the Supreme Soviet.

Art. 78. The report on the fulfillment of the state budget of the Belorussian SSR is approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR and published for general information.

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631 Art. 79. The budgets of the regional, district, city, settlement and village Soviets include the revenues from the local economy, deductions from the state revenues collected within their territory and likewise receipts from local taxes and imposts in amounts fixed by the laws of the USSR and the Belorussian SSR.

Chapter VII. The Courts and the Procurator's Office

692 Art. 80. In the Belorussian SSR justice is administered by the Supreme Court of the Belorussian SSR, the Regional Courts, the Special Courts of the USSR established by decision of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and the People's Courts.

[693] Art. 81. In all Courts cases are tried with the participation of people's assessors, except in cases specially provided for by law.

Art. 82. The Supreme Court of the Belorussian SSR is the highest judicial organ of the Belorussian SSR. The Supreme Court of the Belorussian SSR is charged with the supervision of the judicial activities of all the judicial organs of the Belorussian SSR.